DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 108 094 CG 009 914

AUTHOR Tjosvold, Dean
TITLE Social Face in the Resolution of Conflict.
PUB DATE 75
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Washington, D.C., March 30-April 3, 1975)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS *Behavior Patterns; *Behavior Theories; Communication (Thought Transfer); *Conflict Resolution; Individual Characteristics; *Interaction Process Analysis; *Power Structure; Research Projects; Speeches

ABSTRACT

A theory of social face in bargaining is being developed. Results from three studies suggest that strategies that convey to the high-power bargainer that he appears weak and incapable are likely to increase his competition and his resistance to agreement. Ingratiation in the form of strong affirmation of the high-power person's social face may also be ineffective. The maintenance, not affirmation, of the bargainer's social face may facilitate his reaching agreement. A bargainer who believes that he can maintain face by gaining outcomes, rather than by resisting intimidation, is likely to behave cooperatively. (Author)

**********
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
**********

ED108094

# Social Face in the Resolution of Conflict

Dean Tjosvold

Department of Educational Psychology

The Pennsylvania State University

Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association Annual Convention, March 31 to April 3, 1975, Washington, D. C.

## Abstract

A theory of social face in bargaining is being developed. Results from three studies suggest that strategies that convey to the high-power bargainer that he appears weak and incapable are likely to increase his competition and his resistance to agreement. Ingratiation in the form of strong affirmation of the high-power person's social face may also be ineffective. The maintenance, not affirmation, of the bargainer's social face may facilitate his reaching agreement. A bargainer who believes that he can maintain face by gaining outcomes, rather than by resisting intimidation, is likely to behave cooperatively.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

CG009914

Social Face in the Resolution of Conflict

Wars, racial strife, and political disputes are dramatic instances of intergroup conflict. These conflicts may be waged within schools; educational issues are often the focal points of these conflicts. For example, racial conflict has focused on school segregation, compensatory education and, lately, busing for school desegregation. Less dramatic forms of conflict are common experiences for conflict derives directly from human interdependence. Organizations, such as schools, need to develop mechanisms and skills in resolving conflicts that arise as groups and persons interact with each other.

Social psychologists have emphasized the positive functions of conflict; neither suppressing nor avoiding conflicts is apt to strengthen interpersonal and intergroup relationships. Moreover, conflicts can be exhilerating as they challenge the persons involved to define their positions and interests, thereby increasing self-awareness. Conflict can arouse tension so that problems are directly confronted; once recognized the problems may be cooperatively and creatively resolved. Conflict then is a central medium for personal and organizational change. But persons do not always resolve their conflicts in such a constructive manner. In escalating conflicts, the participants become willing to assume heavy costs to continue the conflict.

The concept of social face has been used to understand why participants may be willing to forego rewards and bear costs in continuing and enlarging a conflict. Deutsch (1961) suggested that persons seek to present their actions as strong and capable to themselves and to other persons. Strategies such as a threat may communicate that the person appears weak and incapable.

To allow oneself to be intimidated and to agree to the affronter's demands may confirm that one is in fact ineffective and does not deserve social esteem. The culturally-defined way of appearing strong is to resist intimidation and, if possible, to counter in kind. Intransigence then may be a means by which a person attempts to regain some measure of social-esteem and, perhaps, self-respect. However, few studies have investigated empirically the role of social face in conflict.

Conflicts often occur between persons of unequal power and status. A high-power person controls more resources valued by the low-power person than the low-power person controls resources valued by the high-power person. Status refers to position in an organizational hierarchy. Disputes between a superintendent and a teacher or between a teacher and a student can both be characterized as conflicts between persons who have unequal power and status. The research reported here investigated conflict between unequal power persons with a focus on the high-power person's responses.

## Method

Three laboratory experiments designed to study social face in conflict have been completed. Subjects were placed in the high-power position: The group they represented controlled more valued resources than did the group with whom they would negotiate. The conflict situation was a bargaining one for each person most preferred the agreements that the other person least preferred, but they would both gain tangible outcomes if they did reach an agreement. Intergroup competition procedures were used to induce the subjects to be committed to their negotiation position and to prepare themselves to defend that position in the negotiations.

The subjects negotiated for twenty minutes with a confederate (posing as a subject) who represented the low-power group. The confederates bargained

in a standard manner except to carry out the experimental inductions necessary to test the hypotheses. The major dependent variable was the agreement of the subject with the confederate's offer. The dependent variables of the subjects' competitive attitudes toward the low-power person were measured in postnegotiation questionnaires.

## Results and Conclusions

### An Affront to Social Face

A strategy that affronts social face, compared to a strategy that does not, was found to increase resistance to agreement and to induce strongly competitive attitudes toward the affronter. In particular, a threat strategy that affronts was found to be ineffective in gaining compliance. (Results reported are significant to at least the .05 level unless otherwise noted.) Moreover, evidence suggests that a threat that attempts to assure that no affront is intended in the threat message may be experienced as an affront and may increase competitive attitudes towards the threatener (Tjosvold, 1973b; Tjosvold, 1974b). A nonnegotiable demand may also affront and, compared to a strategy that includes compromises, may be ineffective for gaining the other person's agreement ($p < .10$) (Tjosvold, 1973a). An affront to social face can be considered a frustration of the other person's goal of maintaining social and self-esteem. This frustration in turn induces the affronted person to dislike, to be competitive towards, and to attempt to frustrate the affronter's goals.

### Affirmation of Social Face

It has tacitly been assumed that to the degree a bargainer's social face is affirmed--that is, he is informed that he does appear strong and capable--he would be more cooperative towards and more willing to agree to the affirmant's demands. A strong affirmation of personal effectiveness,

compared with a mild affirmation, did create positive attitudes towards the affirmant, but did not induce him to agree to his requests. Bargainers whose positions were strongly affirmed were unwilling to agree to the affirmant's requests, perhaps because they perceived him to be weak and not confident (Tjosvold, 1974a). Ingratiation has been suggested as one of the few effective strategies available for low-power persons in their conflicts with high-power persons. But results suggest that strong affirmation of personal effectiveness and position may be ineffective, even counterproductive, strategies for increasing the low-power person's outcomes in conflict.

The Path to Face Maintenance

The culturally defined way of appearing strong and capable to other persons in conflict appears to be intransigence and resistance to agreeing to the other person's demands. The situationally defined way of appearing strong and capable should affect how persons attempt to reach the goal of maintaining social face. Bargainers who believed that their group thought a strong and capable negotiator is one who increases his tangible outcomes, rather than resists intimidation, were cooperative and willing to agree (Tjosvold, 1973a). A negotiator's behavior is apt to be affected by his perception of his group's values concerning strength and capability in conflict.

These experiments have suggested conceptual clarifications and provided support for certain ideas. More research needs to be and is being conducted before a theory of the role of social face in conflict can be confidently advanced and applied. However, it appears that the maintenance of social face, compared to a strong affirmation or an affront, is likely to induce a satisfactory resolution of the conflict.

Educators and other persons involved in conflict may find training in awareness of how feelings of affront may escalate conflict and in understanding of what strategies are likely to affront useful. Teachers may wish to adopt classroom norms against the use of affronting strategies and may wish to promote the idea that persons appear strong and capable by gaining real results, not by being firm and intransigent. More generally, the growing literature on conflict suggests that, as conflict is an important social phenomenon, educational institutions may wish to adopt training programs in conflict management and resolution for educators and students alike.

References

Deutsch, M. The face of bargaining. Operations Research, 1961, 9, 886-897.

Tjosvold, D. Low-power person's strategies in bargaining: Negotiability of demand, maintaining face, and race. Manuscript, The Pennsylvania State University, 1973. (a)

Tjosvold, D. The use of threat by low-power persons in bargaining. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1973. (b)

Tjosvold, D. Affirmation of the high-power person's face in conflict: Ingratiation in conflict. Manuscript, The Pennsylvania State University, 1974. (a)

Tjosvold, D. Threat as a low-power person's strategy in bargaining: Social face and tangible outcomes. International Journal of Group Tensions, 1974, 4, 494-510. (b)